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Atari Online News, Etc.
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~ Ask Jeeves Boots Butler ~ People Are Talking! ~ Portable "Origami"!
~ New Backup Software! ~ China To Have Own Web? ~ Lara Croft: Legend!

~ EU Warns Microsoft! ~ Crackdown On MySpace! ~ AOL Sues Phishers!
~ SEC Busts Ponzi Scam! ~ The Fourth Estate Dead ~ DSL Price War?

-* Six Versions of Windows Vista *-
-* Renowned Doc Duped In Nigerian Scam *-
-* Symantec Service Rates Threats for Users! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, knowing Joe, he's probably cursing Mother Nature about now. We were warned of another winter wind and snow blast crossing over to our area on Thursday, but no one was sure exactly where the storm would hit - a little north or south of Boston was the predicted path. All week, it's been bitterly cold, and windy. But, it's February, and typical for New England weather. So, watching the news Wednesday night, I heard that were likely going to get hit with a few inches of snow because the weather system was heading just south of us. Well, while at work on Thursday, I got a call from one of my vendors. He actually called for work-related issues, but because he lives in a golf course community on Cape Cod, he always rubs it in that someone is always out on the course playing a round. Well, when he called today, the first thing that he asked was whether or not we had a psychiatric unit where I worked. He explained by telling me that he was looking out his living room window (it faces the 3rd hole!), and someone was out on the course...in a white-out of snow! Golfers are fanatically addicted to the game! Don't tell anyone, but I love golf too! So much these days that a few of us are planning to weather the cold and attend a golf expo this weekend!

So anyway, back to the snowstorm and Joe's deafening cursing... The snow never made it far enough north to hit Boston, much less the 25 miles further north to my neck of the woods. However, down Joe's way (yes, he's a couple of hundred miles south of me), they're getting hit pretty good! So, while Joe is shoveling out (or his landlord is!), I'll be up here, with no snow to worry about, and thinking of buying some new golf clubs, and planning on what golf course to try first this year!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Before we get to the UseNet stuff,

I’d like to pose a question to you.

Do you remember when journalists were special people? You know what I mean. Do you remember a time when journalists stood as something special? When there was very little question about their motives and their honesty? Cronkite, Brinkley, Murrow, and even Winchel stood as the highest incarnation of the forth estate. Their word held sway with millions upon millions of people, upper, middle, and lower class, kings and politicians, conservatives and liberals. They were half Hemingway, half Mark Twain, and ALL integrity. When they said something was so, we knew that it was so. There was no question about it. That’s simply the way it was.

The forth estate. Do you know what that’s all about? Well, I don’t remember the finer details anymore, but in England there were considered to be three "estates" to british government: The Crown was the first estate, the House of Lords was the second, and the House of Commons, the third. The idea was that there was another portion of government that was as important as the others... the media was called the forth estate because it was as instrumental as the real three estates in ensuring that things were done fairly and honestly.

So what the hell happened??? Our journalists today are often little more than hangers for designer suits and makeup... half runway model, half failed rock star. Gone, I’m afraid, are the likes of Murrow and Cronkite. Those who knew the worth of and the need for standing not only for excellence in their field, but for integrity and truth and for taking the hard way every so often... just to keep themselves honest.

No, it’s not coincidence that I mention Murrow. No more than the movie ’Good Night and Good Luck’ appearing now is coincidence. The subject matter is germane to our current situation, and we need to pay attention to it. Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it. And, just between you and me, that’s one rerun we can all do without.

Now let’s get to the news, hints, tips and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

’Joe Iron’ asks:

"Is Warp 9 available to download somewhere?"

Edward Baiz tells Joe:

"I have seen demos on the Net for download. It would seem that you should be able to get it as it is an old program. You might try searching for Quick ST which also worked very well. There are some others on the Net that worked pretty good on the ST."

Joe replies:

"Thank you for your help. I found only one useful link: on one of the pompey pirates disk (77) there is quick st v2.21. If you can give me a link to a more recent version, please..."

Edward tells him:

"Actually that version you have is newer than mine. My version actually ran pretty darn good for me. But you must realize that Quick ST later became Warp 9 which made the ST ran a little bit faster."

Ronald Hall asks for help with his CD burner:

Hey guys. I’m having trouble with a Yamaha CDRW.

All I tried to do was swap it out with an existing (older - non working burner, but CD works fine) Plextor in my Atari setup that runs my BBS.

Its HDDriver v8.15 and ExtenDOS Pro v3.4. I set the Yamahas jumpers to the same as the Plextor, ID2, Parity, not terminated. I have a termination block on the end of the SCSI chain.

I tried this Yamaha on my CT60 Falcon and it works fine there, including burning CDs.

So what happens when I turn it on, hooked up to my Mega 4ST and the ICD Link2 is I get this:

HDDriver v8.15
copyright notice

Seagate HD specs
Yamaha CDRW specs

then 3 bombs. Always 3 bombs. I thought maybe ExtenDOS was doing something strange so I disabled it in the auto folder but it still does it.

Anyone have any thoughts, suggestions? Remember, this is a drive that works fine in my Falcon, and going into a setup that works fine with a Plextor CD."

Djuro Pucaric asks Ronald:

"did you try writing in hddriver.sys to bypass cdr drive?
(I think with hdutils.app)"

Rodolphe Czuba adds:

"SCSI parity is not managed by ACSI-SCSI adaptors as I well remember even for ICD! Remove the parity check on SCSI drives!"

Ronald tells Rodolphe:

"Hmm, I can try that - but I've always used SCSI on all my STs with Parity *on*.

Keep in mind, the existing setup with a Plextor drive uses Parity on. So does my Falcon setup. Further, that same Yamaha drive with Parity on worked with my Falcon setup. I can even pull the CDR from my Falcon, plug it into the Mega ST setup and other than changing termination, it works fine.

I'm sure its just some odd little thing somewhere. Just don't know what.

I even went so far as to try this; I took my Mega ST - going to the ICD Link2 - then straight to the Yamaha drive with nothing else. I booted up from the original HDDriver v8.15 floppy. Guess what? Just as soon as it recognizes the Yamaha drive, 3 bombs.

I will try it with parity off though, and report back."

'Atarian90' adds:

"I agree with Rudolphe. Disable parity. It's really not need on the ST.

I believe the other reason the Yamaha CDRW doesn't work with the MegaST4 and ICD Link 2 is because the Yamaha CDRWs use SCSI arbitration. Only the Link97 supports this. The Falcon and TT also support parity and SCSI arbitration. That's why it works on your Falcon."

Ronald now says:

"Okay, I can confirm that HDDriver and this drive apparently do not get along on my Mega ST4.

I disabled everything in my AUTO folder, disabled all CPXs and ACCs, and HDDriver 3 bombs right after recognizing the drive. :-(

I've got an older version of HDDriver, v7.61, so I tried it - it doesn't crash, but you can't get anything to work either.

I tried both versions by booting from the original HDDriver floppy disks as well. Again, v8.15 3 bombs right after it recognizes the drive, and v7.61 gives some weird stuff on screen then exits out to a desktop that only has the A/B icons on it, no C icon for the HD.

Its so odd because this drive works with HDDriver on my CT60 Falcon.

I'll admit, I'm stumped right now.

In case it helps, here is my setup:

Atari Mega ST4 (TOS 1.4/Adspeed)
|
ICD The Link 2

|
Syquest EZ135 drive SCSI
|
Seagate 4 gig hard drive SCSI (external case)
|
Plextor CDR SCSI (same external case)
|
Termination block on back of same case (ends SCSI chain).

Keep in mind this setup works great. When I swap the Plextor out for the Yamaha, thats when the problems begin. But the Yamaha works great on my CT60 Falcon with both HDDriver and ExtenDOS Pro."

'Simon' tells Ronald:

"The version of HDDriver doesn't make a difference. Your host adapter does not support the SCSI features that the Yamaha drive, and possibly newer drives, require.

You need to use a Link97 at least.

The fact it works on the Falcon is because the Falcon supports SCSI2 natively."

Ronald now asks about setting the time on his CT60:

"Okay, while testing some software I figured out that my CT60 Falcon is not holding the time/date. Its booting up somewhere in 1971. Worse, I can use Xcontrol to set the time and date and it won't even hold with the machine turned on! That is odd. I can see it changing between starts, but even while the machine is running?

Is a dead battery the most likely culprit? If so, what's the easiest way to add a new one. It doesn't look as easy as changing the batteries on my MOkay, while testing some software I figured out that my CT60 Falcon is not holding the time/date. Its booting up somewhere in 1971. Worse, I can use Xcontrol to set the time and date and it won't even hold with the machine turned on! That is odd. I can see it changing between starts, but even while the machine is running?

Is a dead battery the most likely culprit? If so, what's the easiest way to add a new one. It doesn't look as easy as changing the batteries on my Mega ST4.ega ST4."

'Chris' tells Ronald:

"The battery is a RTC also... have you tried to clear the NV ram? that seems to be the cause of most silly things like that... might have been corrupted?"

Ronald replies:

"Nope. What's the best way to go about that? I've got a CT60, so is there any special considerations because of that?"

Chris tells Ronald:

"I do not think CT60 effects the clock, you need a program to clear the NVram, There are plenty around in the PD, you could try a search though floppyshops utils there will be loads of programs in there... I do not know of any utils offhand, didn't CT60 have a option somewhere to clear NVram?

Not saying it is that but worth a try... maybe rodolphe could help you better with that..."

Rodolphe Czuba hears his name and jumps in to tell Ronald:

"There is CBOOT to clear and set the NVRAM.
CBOOT is inside the CT2.ZIP package on my web site.

But the Time/date function cannot be corrupted by software ...
software can corrupt NVRAM...but the RTC is independent...
The test is simple : Put the correct time & date....turn OFF....
Wait for 1 minute at least...
Turn ON....if the date/time is stupid, the battery is dead...

Nothing to say more!

Now you can remove it (unsolder) and solder a new one for 10 more years ...

Buy it for 11 $ at BEST Electronics (San Jose CA)!

So simple too.."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station. Good night, good luck, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   '24: The Game" Ships!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!

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Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend

Tomb Raider: Legend revives the athletic, intelligent and entertaining adventurer who won the hearts and minds of gamers worldwide. Lara comes alive with intricately animated expressions, moves and abilities. An arsenal of modern equipment, such as a magnetic grappling device, binoculars, frag grenades, personal lighting device and communications equipment, allows gamers to experience tomb raiding as never before.

Eidos and Crystal Dynamics shaped Lara’s look and movements to be an inherent extension of her skills, motivation and personality. Lara’s character model features natural structure, realistic textures, detailed facial features, reactive eyes and fluid motion, all of which make her part of a living environment.

New character animations and controls allow her to move through stunning environments with grace and precision, while an understanding of the game’s original appeal reinvigorates the fundamental explore-and-solve adventure experience.

Tomb Raider: Legend is slated for release on the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system, PC and the Xbox video game system from Microsoft.

24: The Game Ships For Playstation 2

2K Games, a publishing label of Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc., announced that 24: The Game - the action title based on the hit Fox television series "24" starring Kiefer Sutherland - has shipped to retail stores across North America. 24: The Game is available exclusively for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system.

24: The Game features an unprecedented level of involvement from the team behind the groundbreaking television series. Many key actors and actresses from the series provided their likenesses and voice talents to 24: The Game including Kiefer Sutherland, Elisha Cuthbert and Carlos Bernard. In addition, the game’s storyline has been written in collaboration with series story editor and staff writer Duppy Demetrius, with music composed by Sean Callery, an Emmy award-winner for his work on 24.

"24: The Game delivers all the action and excitement you would expect to see in the hit 24 television series," said Christoph Hartmann, Managing Director for 2K Games. "It is an intense gaming experience with the same race-against-the-clock tension the show is well known for. 24: The Game also provides a valuable back story to the events happening between seasons two and three."

Elie Dekel, Executive Vice President, Fox Licensing and Merchandising, "I don’t think there’s another show out there that’s better suited for a video game. Thanks to the contributions of the series star, Kiefer Sutherland, as well as the series’ story editor and composer, this exciting video game promises to be authentically true to the television show and will delight even the most critical fan."

24: The Game enables gamers to take on multiple roles from the show including Jack Bauer, Tony Almeida and Chase Edmunds as they complete more than 50 solo and team-based missions that feature elements such as shooting, stealth and puzzle-based gameplay along with the ability to interrogate captured enemies to obtain vital information. The game designers have also incorporated many of the series' distinctive visual and audio features, including its innovative use of split-screen windows for simultaneous plot developments and a constant race against the 24-hour clock.

Offered exclusively for the PlayStation 2, 24: The Game is rated M for mature and will be available at retail stores across North America for a suggested retail price of $39.99.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Microsoft To Offer 6 Versions of Windows Vista

Microsoft Corp. plans six core offerings of its upcoming Windows Vista operating system, targeting how people use computers instead of PC hardware specifications, the company said on Monday.

The world's largest software maker plans three offerings aimed at consumers, two at business users and a stripped-down edition for emerging markets. Unlike the current Windows XP, there will no versions designed specifically for advanced 64-bit computing, multimedia computers or Tablet PCs.

"We're delivering the exact same number of offerings as in Windows XP, but the big difference is that each of those offerings are targeted differently with a different set of features," said Barry Goffe, director of Microsoft's Windows client product marketing.

Windows Vista, due out in the second half of 2006, is the much-anticipated upgrade to Microsoft's flagship product. Windows, which is found in about 90 percent of all computer desktops, is also one of Microsoft's earnings cash cows.

The company, which accidentally posted some details of the Vista product lineup on one of its Web sites earlier in the month, has promised that Vista will feature improved security, simplified search across the desktop and a cleaner interface.

Redmond, Washington-based Microsoft expects Windows Vista Home Premium to be the mainstream consumer product, allowing users to record and watch high-definition television, burn and author DVDs and perform other multimedia functions.

It also incorporates Tablet PC technology to decipher handwriting to let users write notes on the computer.

Vista Home Premium will be the middle option for consumers, sandwiched between the high-end Windows Vista Ultimate, which also includes business-oriented features, and a bare-bones Windows Vista Home Basic without the multimedia capabilities.

For business users, Microsoft plans Windows Vista Business for small and medium-sized businesses that may not have a information technology support staff.

Windows Vista Enterprise will be aimed at large, global companies with encryption features to protect information even if a computer is stolen and tools to enable compatibility with applications designed for older operating systems.

All the versions for consumers and businesses are available for both 32-bit or 64-bit computer systems. Sixty-four-bit processors can crunch twice as many bits of information at one time as the more prevalent 32-bit processors.

Microsoft will also offer a version of Vista Home Basic and Vista Business without a Windows Media Player in Europe to comply with European Union antitrust rulings.

Symantec’s New Consumer Backup Software

Symantec announced new backup and recovery software aimed at consumers Monday. Called Norton Save & Restore, the software is due to ship in late March.

More home users are creating and storing increasing amounts of digital content such as photos and music. In order to protect this content against malware as well as hardware and software outages, consumers who may have never previously considered backing up their computers are looking for technology options.

Symantec designed the Norton Save & Restore software to be easy to install and set up, with a focus on automating many features, according to a press release. The product includes predefined backups of common folders and file types. Users can choose how backups take place - prearranged ahead of time, on-demand, or event-driven - and they can also encrypt and password-protect their backup files.

Consumers also have the option to use Symantec’s Norton Ghost disk imaging software to create an exact image of their entire hard drive without having to reboot their computers.

The estimated retail price for Norton Save & Restore is $69.99. The software can be preordered and, in late March, also will be available in retail stores.

Symantec made two other announcements Monday.

The company said it will start to ship a new range of its Gateway Security appliances for small to midsize businesses (SMBs). For its enterprise

customers, Symantec is launching its Intelligent Archiving Partner program, an initiative with third-party firms designed to give corporations more detailed information about the content and context of what's in their data stores.

Through the program, customers will be able to integrate Symantec's Enterprise Vault archiving software with ECM (enterprise content management) and records management products from an initial four firms-Hummingbird, Interwoven, MDY, and Stellent. Symantec's aim is to eventually partner with all the leading ECM vendors, the release stated.

Microsoft Touts PC-like Portable "Origami" Device

A new portable media device that allows users to listen to music, play video games, browse the Internet and jot hand-written notes is the initial vision of a product in development by Microsoft Corp. and its partners, the software giant said on Monday.

Microsoft acknowledged that an early version of its new hand-held PC-like device was featured in a video on the Web site for marketing firm Digital Kitchen.

"While Origami is a concept we've been working on with partners, please know that the video seen on Digital Kitchen's Web site is a year old and represents our initial exploration into this form factor, including possible uses and scenarios," a Microsoft spokesman said.

While some media reports flagged the product as a possible rival to Apple Computer Inc.'s iPod digital music player or Sony Corp.'s PlayStation Portable game device, "Origami" seemed to incorporate more functions and appeared to be much larger than those gadgets.

The company declined to disclose details about the device, including when it might be available for sale, but it said there would be announcements over the coming weeks.

The device appeared to be a tablet PC, a notebook-shaped computer that allows users to write with a digital pen to input text on handwriting recognition software. It was about the size of a oversized post-card.

The video showed young people using the "Origami" device to sketch pictures, use a map with global positioning satellite technology, listen to digital music and play "Halo," a popular Microsoft video game.

It was not immediately clear whether the product would be a Microsoft-branded device or if the software giant would simply provide software and services. Microsoft would not reveal the identity of its partners on the project.

Microsoft started to generate buzz about the device when the Web site www.origamiproject.com registered to the company touted an unknown product with cryptic messages like "do you know me?" and "do you know what I can do?"

The Web site promised to disclose more information on Thursday, but Microsoft said there will be no announcement this week about "Origami."

Intentional or not, the mysterious marketing campaign fueled speculation and rumors usually reserved for Apple and its ultra-secretive new product announcements.

AOL Sues Groups Under Anti-Phishing Law

America Online is taking advantage of a first-of-its-kind anti-"phishing" law in Virginia to sue three international groups that allegedly stole information from unsuspecting AOL users by sending e-mail that appeared to be legitimate messages from the company.

AOL's three lawsuits, filed Monday in federal court in Alexandria, Va., seek $18 million for the unit of Time Warner Inc.

The suits allege that the 30 phishers, who have not yet been identified by name, violated the 2005 Virginia anti-phishing act, which covers AOL because it is based in Dulles, Va. The suits also cite federal computer fraud law and the Lanham Act, which protects trademarks.

The phishers cited in the suits are accused of sending tens of thousands of e-mails and setting up Web sites that purportedly were from AOL customer service.

AOL spokesman Nicholas Graham said it was unclear how many members were ensnared, but he said the victims gave up screen names, passwords and financial information. The phishers are believed to be part of a multinational network spanning the United States, Germany and Romania.

These lawsuits follow similar efforts by AOL and other Internet service providers to go after e-mail spam artists and online scammers.

Last March, for example, Microsoft Corp. filed 117 federal lawsuits against alleged phishers. AOL has won at least 35 such cases for tens of millions of dollars, according to Graham.

SEC Shuts Down $50 Million Online Hustle

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has filed fraud charges against the owner of an "autosurf" Web site, accusing Charis Johnson, 33, of operating a $50 million Ponzi scam from which she snagged some $2 million to fill her own coffers.

Filed in Los Angeles federal court, the suit alleges that Johnson, a resident of Charlotte, North Carolina, operated a Ponzi scheme via www.12dailypro.com. The scheme, according to the SEC complaint, netted Johnson a whopping $50 million from the more than 300,000 members who joined up since the middle of 2005.

"The defendants falsely represented that upgraded members earnings 'are financed not only [by] incoming member fees, but also with multiple income streams including advertising and off-site investments,'" the SEC alleges. "In fact, at least 95 percent of 12daily Pro's revenues have come from new investments in the form of membership fees from new or existing members."

The SEC has frozen $1.9 million that Johnson transferred to her personal bank account along with other 12daily Pro assets.

In January, StormPay, Johnson's payment provider, discontinued the Web site's payment services after it began to suspect the site was involved in an illegal scheme. Shortly afterward, the payment site allegedly was the victim of a denial-of-service (DoS) attack that took it offline for two days.

According to the Better Business Bureau of Middle Tennessee, StormPay received the greatest number of complaints in the first six weeks of 2006 than any other business in the Middle Tennessee or Southern Kentucky region.

In statements, Johnson denied any misconduct and placed the blame on a payment dispute with StormPay. She also claimed that her autosurf site was completely legit.

"Let me assure you, had they deemed this to be a scam, I would not be chatting with your right now. I would be in custody," Johnson said shortly after the FBI announced that an investigation had begun. In a blog posting, Johnson claimed that the SEC never interviewed her or examined 12daily Pro's data before filing the charges.

The FBI began its investigation of 12daily Pro's claims of extravagant returns of member's investments less than two weeks ago. Johnson promised investors they could earn as much as a 44 percent return on their investment in only 12 days simply by reading advertisements on the Internet.

Dubbed a "paid autosurf" scam by the SEC, the scheme required members to purchase "units" at $6 a pop and look at advertisements that would rotate automatically in a member's Web browser. The advertisers supposedly pay the "host," in this case 12daily Pro, that would then pay its members.

The SEC's complaint alleges that 12daily Pro solicited investors to become upgraded members by purchasing the "units." The company promised to pay each upgraded member 12 percent of the membership fee per day for 12 days. At the end of that roughly two week period, the member would have realized a 144 percent return, with a profit of 44 percent on the original membership fee. To receive the fee, members had to agree to view at least 12 Web pages per day during the 12 day period.

According to the SEC, payments that members believed were generated from these paid advertisements actually consisted almost entirely of payments made by other members of the service, which is a classic Ponzi scheme.

"Paid autosurf programs have become an enormous industry on the Internet," said Randall R. Lee, director of the SEC's Pacific office, in a statement. "When these schemes depend on attracting new members in order to pay returns to current members, they are destined to collapse."

In the statement, Lee urged the public to exercise extreme caution before investing in any get-rich-quick scheme.

Symantec Service Rates Threats for Consumers

Symantec unveiled on Feb. 28 a free service to warn home computer users about risks spreading over e-mail, the Web, file sharing and instant messaging networks.

The Symantec Internet Threat Meter uses data from the company's Global Intelligence Network to rate Internet threats from low to high risk.

The new meter rates the risk of activities such as using e-mail or Web surfing based on the prevalence of high-risk threats and attacks using those mediums. For example, extremely high volumes of phishing and spam attacks or a critical e-mail client vulnerability would push the e-mail threat rating to "high risk," whereas a spike in adware and spyware would lift the risk rating for Web activities, Symantec said.

The meter is intended to alert consumers to the online threat environment and to attacks that may be stealthy and more targeted than in past years, Symantec said.

However, the new Internet Threat Meter provides little detail beyond a basic risk rating. On Feb. 28, for example, Symantec rated e-mail activity a "medium risk" and advised e-mail users to exercise "extra caution," despite "no high priority malicious code employing e-mail as a propagation vector." Web activities were deemed a "low risk," despite the observation that there are "multiple exploits available for recently patched vulnerabilities in various Microsoft client side software," and that "users could be affected by simply browsing to a Web site."

Other companies and organizations also offer threat meters for consumers. ESET Software's Virus Radar Web site provides extensive information on the top online virus threats and historical threat trends-in four languages.

The SANS Institute's Internet Storm Center also provides detailed information on a wide range of Internet threats and trend information. ISC culls information from intrusion sensors deployed around the world and is used by technical experts and system administrators.

The granddaddy of free online threat monitoring sites is the Talisker Security Wizardry Portal, which is designed for government and military networks. Talisker streams real-time information from Symantec and DShield (the same IDS network used by ISC), as well as open-source information from news outlets, etc.

The Talisker portal recently surfaced in the background of a White House photo depicting President Bush addressing staff at the National Security Agency.

EU Warns Microsoft It Must Change Course

Microsoft Corp. will be fined if it keeps up its current conduct, the EU's antitrust chief warned Thursday after the company accused the EU of withholding documents and colluding with Microsoft's rivals before filing charges last December.

"If we pursue the line we are following now, there will be fines and they won't be small fines," EU Competition Commissioner Neelie Kroes told Dow Jones Newswires.

The EU has threatened euro2 million ($2.4 million) in daily fines, backdated to Dec. 15, unless the company obeys a 2004 antitrust order to provide competitors with the information needed to make their software work with Microsoft servers.

Microsoft claims that it worked strenuously last autumn to meet the EU demands and that regulators kept shifting the goalposts - something the Commission firmly denies.

Speaking to Dutch business leaders in The Hague, Kroes said Microsoft could still plead its case in a Commission hearing on March 30 and 31 before the EU decides to impose fines.

"We will listen to Microsoft and their lawyers and after that we will reach a decision as soon as possible," she said.

Microsoft alleged Thursday that regulators had "inappropriate contacts" with rival companies and an independent monitor, Neil Barrett, known as the "trustee" - which it said called into question the impartiality of Barrett's report.

The EU based its December charges largely on Barrett's views that the technical documentation Microsoft had supplied needed a drastic overhaul to be workable.

"These contacts call into question whether the reports ... are really independent, impartial assessments of Microsoft's technical documentation, or instead are argumentative tracts developed for the Commission with the assistance of Microsoft's competitors," said Horacio Gutierrez, Microsoft's associate general counsel in Europe.

The EU said it had no immediate comment on the content or admissibility of what it called Microsoft's "supplementary response" to the charges.

Microsoft said the Commission has held back documents - in particular correspondence between EU officials, Barrett, other experts and rival companies - that it believes is crucial to preparing its antitrust defense. "Microsoft is entitled to learn the full extent to which the Commission may have influenced the views expressed by the trustee," it said.

Gutierrez said correspondence between the Commission and four U.S. rivals that it received on Feb. 13 show that the Commission, the trustee, and Microsoft's adversaries were secretly collaborating throughout the fall of 2005 "in a manner inconsistent with the Commission's role as neutral regulator and the trustee's role as independent monitor."

The company said many of these contacts were not recorded in the antitrust case file and so were shielded from Microsoft's view.

Microsoft's lawyer wrote to the Commission last month to say it was aware EU officials were in contact with Sun Microsystems Inc., IBM Corp., Oracle Corp. and Novell Inc., all of which license the communications code at the heart of the dispute.

Microsoft claimed the Commission also facilitated secret meetings between Barrett and "another of Microsoft's adversaries" that it did not name, saying it offered to help Barrett fly to Texas for the meeting.

The software company also complained that this correspondence was supplied to it just two days before a deadline to respond to the EU charges - too

late for it to give it proper consideration.

The EU levied a record euro 497 million (US$613 million) fine against Microsoft in 2004. It also ordered the company to share code with rivals and offer a version of Windows without the Media Player software.

Microsoft is appealing the ruling and the case will be heard in April by the European Court of First Instance, the EU's second-highest court.

China Denies Plans To Split Internet

Recent reports that China is creating its own version of the Internet are being denied by the country's China Internet Network Information Center. In news reports from Beijing, the CNNIC has clarified that there is no separate Chinese Internet in the works, and no new top-level domains.

The misunderstanding came as a result of an article in the China People's Daily, which noted that the country's Ministry of Information Industry had changed China's domain-name system. Supposedly, China was working on its own top-level domains that would parallel .com, .net, and others.

The article stated that Chinese Internet users would be able to access an Internet not managed by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN).

Analysts expressed worry that such a shift not only would give China even greater control over censoring content from its Internet users, but also would lead to domain-routing headaches for ICANN, VeriSign, and others responsible for maintaining the integrity of the domain-name system.

As soon as the People's Daily article appeared, ICANN officials were told by the CNNIC that there might have been a misunderstanding about work being done with second-level domains as opposed to top-level domains like .com.

The new second-level domains, which are geared for China's provinces and regions, still would appear under the three existing top-level domains of .cn, .com, and .net. These top-level domains have been in place in China since 2002.

In clarifying its new domain strategy, the CNNIC emphasized that China will continue to operate under ICANN management, with no plans to bypass the organization.

A recent proposal between ICANN and VeriSign, which would cause price changes for domain names if it is accepted, came at the same time as the reports of China seeking to develop its own Internet.

The two stories together could show growing unrest over ICANN's management of the Internet.

"China wouldn't be alone in wanting something that isn't controlled by ICANN," said John Berard, spokesperson for the Coalition for ICANN Transparency. "Other countries have also expressed dissatisfaction with the way things are being handled."

Even if the reports about China do prove to be untrue, many believe that the current proposal with VeriSign will cause more scrutiny of ICANN, with

further discussion about how the Internet is controlled.

DSL Price War Helps Close Broadband Gap

Last year was the first in which telephone companies added more broadband Internet subscribers than their cable TV rivals did, according to a research report.

The largest DSL providers, which have been engaged in a price war that has slashed promotional prices as low as $13 a month, added 5.2 million subscribers in 2005, according to Leichtman Research Group’s analysis of company statements.

The major cable companies gained 4.4 million high-speed Internet subscribers last year, for a total of 24.3 million. That means cable retained a narrowing lead in total subscribers over the phone-line based DSL technology, or digital subscriber line, which had 18.5 million customers.

The numbers reflect the 20 largest broadband companies in the United States, with 42.8 million total subscribers and about 94 percent of the market. Bruce Leichtman, principal analyst at Leichtman Research, estimates that around 35 million people are still using dial-up access.

The number of new cable broadband customers has been fairly stable each year since 2002, while DSL growth has been accelerating. Meanwhile, the overall phone vs. cable fight is becoming even more contested as phone companies begin rolling out subscription TV services in some locations.

Prices for low-end and introductory DSL services were cut in half last year, as SBC Communications, now AT&T Inc., introduced a one-year plan for $15 which was matched by Verizon Communications Inc.

The phone companies hit the "grand slam" with those price plans in the second half of the year, Leichtman said.

"The question is, do you want to keep doing that?" Leichtman asked. Competing on price can be a dangerous game, he noted.

The price war has continued this year. Last month, AT&T introduced a yearlong DSL contract for $13. When the contract runs out, the price jumps to $30.

Cable companies typically charge $35 and up for broadband, while generally offering higher download speeds than DSL providers.

The largest cable broadband providers in 2005 were Comcast Corp., with 8.5 million and Time Warner Cable with 4.8 million.

Among the telephone companies, the leader was AT&T with 6.9 million broadband subscribers. Verizon had 5.1 million, which includes an undisclosed but relatively small number of fiber-optic connections in addition to DSL.

Renowned Doctor Duped in Internet Scam

A renowned psychiatrist lost up to $3 million over 10 years to a Nigerian Internet scam, his son alleges in a lawsuit.

Dr. Louis A. Gottschalk, an 89-year-old neuroscientist who works at the University of California, Irvine medical plaza that bears his name, acknowledged losing $900,000 to "some bad investments," according to court papers.

Guy Gottschalk filed a lawsuit last month asking a judge to remove his father as administrator of the family's $8 million partnership. He alleges his father sent the money to a scammer who promised the doctor a cut of a huge sum of cash trapped in African bank accounts in exchange for money advances.

He also alleges his father destroyed bank records to cover up his losses.

The younger Gottschalk claims in court papers he filed the suit to prevent his father from being further victimized.

Louis Gottschalk accuses his son in legal documents of carrying out an unspecified "vendetta" against him. Guy Gottschalk lost a bid last October to have a conservator oversee the family partnership, documents show.

The Nigerian Internet scam is a long-running con that targets people with e-mail accounts. Criminals send junk e-mail to thousands of unsuspecting people offering them a share in a large fortune if they can only provide a smaller amount of money up front. The criminal takes the money and then disappears.

Louis Gottschalk gained prominence in 1987 by claiming that his studies of President Reagan's speech patterns showed Reagan had been suffering from diminished mental ability as early as 1980.

Schools Cracking Down on MySpace

Is it a virtual hangout for millions of American teenagers, like a sprawling electronic shopping plaza, or a magnet for sexual predators and pornographers?

MySpace.com is a bit of both, say Rhode Island education officials who have banned the fast-growing teen social networking Web site from 80 percent of their schools out of concern is was putting children at risk.

"There's a lot of personal information and things like that on MySpace.com-a bit more than I'm comfortable with," said James Murphy, assistant director of technology for the public schools in Coventry, Rhode Island.

The Rhode Island Network for Educational Technology, a nonprofit that handles Internet networks for the state's 36 public school districts, said 80 percent of the schools had requested an Internet filter to screen out MySpace.com.

A blizzard of news headlines in national media have raised alarm with parents and school authorities-from "Man arrested in MySpace.com teen-sex

case" to "Sex predators are stalking MySpace; is your teenager a target?" and "Space Invaders."

School districts in Florida and several other states and private universities have also installed filters on their Internet networks that block the site, which media mogul Rupert Murdoch's News Corp bought for $580 million in July.

MySpace.com, which boasts 56 million members, allows teenagers and young adults to find friends and express themselves by posting profiles and blogs, or Web journals covering everything from their favorite singers to schoolwork and their sexual preferences and other intimate details.

In Connecticut, which borders Rhode Island, the state's attorney general, Richard Blumenthal, is investigating a number of sexual assaults with links to MySpace.

Authorities in Santa Cruz, California, arrested a 26-year-old in February for felony child molestation after he met a 14-year-old on MySpace. In other cases, MySpace.com has been used to threaten classmates.

"What could have been probably an innocent place for kids to meet has turned almost to be everybody's nightmare," said Monique Nelson, executive director of Web Wise Kids, a nonprofit Internet safety organization based in California.

"I'm glad to see Rhode Island taking a stand. It's unfortunate because I don't think the Web site was obviously originally designed to have things like this happen," she said.

Elliot Krieger, a spokesman for the Rhode Island Department if Education, said each school district can decide for itself whether to filter out MySpace.com or other web sites that have adult or inappropriate content for children.

The Rhode Island ban affects about 130,000 students while they are using computers at school. But students were always one step ahead and finding new ways to use the Internet or surfing sites like MySpace.com from home, Murphy said.

"There is no filtering service that is going to be foolproof," he said. "We try to keep on top of this and stay ahead but it's a challenge."

Pam Christman, director of technology programs and network services at the Rhode Island Network for Educational Technology, said about 40 percent of the state's schools had also sought bans on a long list of Web blogging sites.

MySpace has said that its users have to be at least 14 years old and are required to fill out an online form that includes their date of birth.

Ask Jeeves Boots the Butler

On Monday, search firm Ask Jeeves officially became Ask.com, with a new main page, a new logo, a simplified interface, and several new tools designed to cater to Internet-savvy users. The company also officially dropped its Ask Jeeves mascot, a British-looking butler.

The company hopes to gain a foothold in the quickly moving search market by providing a self-service approach to customers rather than continue with its former direction of being a full-service search vendor.

"After ten years of dutifully serving a growing population of Internet users, Jeeves decided to step down as the face of AskJeeves.com and retire in style," a message on the Web site noted.

The retirement of the company's mascot is indicative, in some way, of how search has evolved over the past decade. Jeeves was created as a way to help new Internet users find information on the Web without feeling intimidated.

Users were encouraged to type questions - such as "Where can I buy shoes online?" - rather than use keyword terms like "online shoe store" to gain access to the information they were seeking.

But as the Web has become more widely used, and most users have become comfortable doing regular keyword searches on sites like Google and Yahoo, the helping-hand approach of Ask Jeeves is no longer as needed as it was back in 1996.

The change drove Ask Jeeves to focus on improving its search-engine technology and give Jeeves "the opportunity to relax."

The new Ask.com boasts a do-it-yourself online toolbox designed to help users refine different types of searches, including hunts for local information and searches for files on their own desktops. There now are 20 types of search tools offered by Ask.com.

By creating tools that give users the ability to search with fewer clicks, the company might be able to gain a usability advantage over rivals like Google or MSN, which require several clicks to dig for specialized data. Currently, the company is in fourth position in the search market.

"The company is trying to upgrade its image with the public, and not just by losing Jeeves," said Yankee Group analyst Jennifer Simpson. "Changing their logo is a big part of it, but they're also looking at more niche search and other refinements."

In ousting Jeeves, though, Simpson noted that the company was smart in how it made the transition, asking users to vote on his retirement plans, for example. "They gave him a decent farewell," she said. "That was a nice bit of branding on its own."

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